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ABSTRACT

This Child Development Associate (CDA) training module helps interns establish a preschool center environment that promotes the development of positive self concepts among young children. Objectives are stipulated, activities for achieving each objective are suggested, and an assessment checklist is provided. A study guide emphasized (1) understanding the term "self-concept," (2) physical and social factors in the development of self-concept, (3) understanding and accepting children as they are, and (4) environmental influences on the development of a positive self-concept. Resources for further study and supplementary guides concerning "teacher-craft" ways to encourage children are included. (Author/RH)

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Competency Based Training Module #20

ENHANCING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT

by

Barbara Emmons

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NOTE TO THE INTERN:

This CDA training module has been prepared as a guide for you and your CDA Advisor to help you to develop certain practical skills necessary for your work in an early childhood center. Although it contains many useful ideas, it is not intended to be a self-study program. Many decisions about your training experiences are left up to you and your CDA Advisor. The activities given in this module are "suggested" activities, and should be used if they are appropriate to your learning needs. You or your Advisor may come up with other activities more appropriate for your particular situation, children, or background of experience and training.

Your Advisor will evaluate your performance in each of the objectives. S/he may do so right away on the basis of skills you already have, or s/he may evaluate you after you have done some learning activities, or both. If you think you already have the skills required by some of the objectives, you should ask to be evaluated right away. You may not have to do any activities for some of the objectives. You do, however, have to demonstrate the required skills for your advisor; you cannot just tell s/him that you have the skills. If your advisor has already observed some of the skills before you entered this module, s/he may check you off on those skills without further observation.

When your Advisor has evaluated your performance in an objective area as satisfactory, s/he will initial and date that objective as completed in your copy of this module. When all of the objectives have been initialled, you have completed the requirements of this module and have earned credit. Keep this module as your permanent record of completion, and as a reference to use in your classroom.

As you can see, how fast you are able to complete this module depends on a lot of things: how much time and effort you can put into it; how much help your Advisor can give you; how much experience and training you have already had.

The Arizona/Nevada HSST/CDA Program hopes that you find your participation in CDA a valuable and practical training experience. We would appreciate any suggestions you may have for improvements in the training program and in this module.

ENHANCING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT

CDA TRAINING MODULE #20

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This module relates to the following CDA Competencies:*

C. BUILD POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT AND INDIVIDUAL STRENGTH.
(see items 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 5a, 5b, 5c.)

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*For reference, see the Arizona HSST/CDA "CDA Assessment"

ENHANCING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT

INTRODUCTION

Although teachers of young children may disagree on many things, there is one goal that all teachers should share: Each child must be encouraged and helped to develop his own full potential as a human being. In order to do this the child needs a healthy, positive self-concept.

When the child enters the center, he already has an idea of himself as a person. It is important for the teacher to know what that idea is and to understand the influences that led to that idea. It is also important to accept the child as he is. Before we can work for change, we must care for the person who is.

Having accepted the child, the teacher will build on his strengths and work with him to fill his needs. This means establishing an environment for the growth of a positive self-concept. Environment in this context means everyone and everything within the center.

OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, ASSESSMENT

CDA Intern's Name_____

Date of Entry_____Date of Completion_____

OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
1. The Intern will be able to define the term "self-concept". ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	1. Read Section I of the Study Guide. a. Find as many other words as you can that begin with self and discuss with your Advisor how these words relate to the term "self-concept". b. List as many answers as you can think of to the question, "Who am I?"
2. The Intern will understand the influences on the development of an individual's self-concept. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	2. Read Section II of the Study Guide. a. Observe the children in your center and select one child who you think has a very positive self-concept. b. Discuss with your Advisor what kinds of influences helped that child develop his positive self-concept.
3. The Intern will respect and accept the child's level of self-concept. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	3. Read Section III of the Study Guide. a. Discuss with your Advisor the difference between self-concept and self-esteem. b. Observe the children in your center to determine the level of each one's self-esteem. c. Demonstrate a creative activity that allows each child to operate at his own level.
4. The Intern will provide an environment for continuous development of positive self-concept. ASSESSMENT _____ date/initial	4. Read Section IV of the Study Guide. a. Identify for your Advisor anything in the environment of your center which might block the development of positive self-concept. b. Discuss with your Advisor how you might change or improve the environment for developing positive self-concept. c. Add one or more new items to the center which reflect the children's culture. d. Make a list of suggestions for visitors or volunteers in the center which will help them help children develop positive self-concept.

ENHANCING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT

STUDY GUIDE

I. One way to understand the term self-concept is to look at it on both sides of the hyphen and then as a whole.

A. Self is another way of saying "I".

1. "I" was before anyone else was.

a. A baby has a sense of self in the womb.

b. After the baby is born, a long period of time elapses before he can separate the world outside from the "I" that is himself.

2. "I" am today.

a. I have body needs which must be met: nourishment, warmth, rest.

b. I have emotional needs which must be met: acceptance, love, feelings of worth.

B. Concept is an image or seeing.

1. An external image is a reflection

a. As in a mirror.

b. As in the eyes of others (shown through their reactions or responses).

2. An internal image is self-seeing.

a. I may see myself as beautiful, capable, and worthy of respect.

b. I may see myself as ugly, unable to do things, and unworthy of respect.

C. Self-concept is the answer to the question, "Who am I?"

1. I am who I see myself to be.

2. I am also who I see myself becoming.

II. There are two main factors (physical and social) in the development of an individual's self-concept.

A. There are a number of physical influences which contribute.

1. Hereditary - The genes a child inherits from his parents effect his coloring, physical characteristics, and some aptitudes.

2. Pre-natal influences include nourishment, possible disease, effects of drugs among others.

3. Birth - The birth process is always traumatic, but it may result in either a normal, healthy baby or one suffering from oxygen starvation or other injuries.

4. How the body needs are met is extremely important.

   a. Is there sufficient nourishment given when needed and wanted?

   b. Is the baby kept warm and dry?

   c. Is he allowed to get a sufficient amount of rest?

   d. What are the physical stimuli in his environment? Are they:

      1) generally soothing?

      2) generally irritating?

      3) sufficient to arouse interest?

      4) insufficient?

B. Social factors also have a great deal to do with the child's emotional well-being.

   1. The relationships within the family set the pattern for future relationships.

      a. The persons who fill the roles of mother and father are primary influences in the child's development.

         1) The "mother" is the single most important influence on the child.

            a) Does she feed, dry, warm, comfort, and give the child affection?

            b) Does she enjoy doing these things?

         2) The father traditionally is seen as the provider for the family.

            a) He puts a roof over their heads and keeps food on the table.

            b) He is their strength and their shield from the outside world.

      b. In some cultures and in today's changing society, these roles may not be filled by the natural mother and father but it is important that they be filled by someone.

         1) Members of the extended family may have certain responsibilities for the child.

            a) Know who these people are.

            b) Know their place in the child's life.

2) Sex roles may not play an important part in the child's family.

a) Mother may work and father stay home.

b) Mother or father may have to be both parents for the child.

c. The child's position in the family often determines not only how he is treated by his parents but also how he is treated by his siblings.

1) How many children are there in the family?

2) What are their sexes?

3) What is the birth order (oldest, youngest, etc.) of each?

2. The culture (not only traditional but also contemporary) of the community in which the child lives also effects his developing self-concept.

a. What is his family's status within the community?

b. What are the accepted child-rearing practices?

c. What emphasis is given to the care and education of children?

III. The teacher must understand and accept the child as he is.

A. According to Norma E. Law in an article in the NAEYC publication, Ideas That Work With Children, children come to us equipped with certain strengths:

1. Assertiveness: "I exist."

a. This assertiveness may have both positive and negative aspects for the teacher.

b. It must be remembered however, that it is a powerful tool for developing a positive self-concept and should not be discouraged.

EXAMPLE:

When a visitor comes into the center, Frances stands very close and stares; Jimmy becomes very noisey; Sue grabs the visitor's hand and drags s/him aroun1. All of these actions are ways of saying, "Me! Me!" and when the visitor has acknowledged the children, they will usually return to their play.

2. Egocentricity: "Other things exist only in relation to me."

EXAMPLE:

The child is the center of his world.

a. Each child has a unique way of viewing the world.

b. The sensitive teacher will understand this and listen to what the child is saying in both words and actions.

3. Autonomy: "I want to choose for myself."

a. The teacher should encourage this striving for independence even though it is sometimes difficult for s/him to cope with.

b. Too many rules get in the way of this developing independence.

1) There must be some limits but they should be based mainly on protecting the child's safety and the rights of others. These rules are known as proscriptions.

EXAMPLE:

"You may not go down the slide head first."

2) Far more dangerous to the freedom and independence of the child are prescriptions.

EXAMPLE:

"You must sit still and listen to this story."

4. Resiliency: the ability to bounce back.

a. Fortunately for children, when we really care about them (and show it) our mistakes do not hurt them so much - they recover.

b. This resiliency is a natural part of the child's "push to grow" and is not easily thwarted.

5. Adaptability: the ability to accept the way things are and move on to something else.

a. This occurs when the child is allowed to learn naturally in a free-flowing situation.

b. Premature teaching can get in the way of or destroy this strength in a child.

6. The reach for other people: the means by which a child becomes a social being.

   a. This is a natural action for children and needs only a warm reception to be reinforced.

   b. One of the main things a teacher needs to give to a child is time - time to observe, time to learn to trust in his responses, time to come together.

7. Wholeness: A child is made of many parts that are one as is his world.

   a. The teacher must deal with the whole child.

   b. Those things which weaken any part may weaken the whole.

B. Children may also come to us with certain weaknesses which may express themselves in negative ways.

1. According to Abraham H. Maslow's growth theory, these are deficiency motivations. They occur when certain basic needs are not met.

   a. The need for safety; creature comforts, and protection.

   b. The need for belonging - member of a family, a community, a special group.

   c. Need for love - warmth, affection, touching.

   d. Need for respect - a person with rights and ideas of his own.

   e. Need for self-esteem, which can only come after other needs are met.

2. Change begins when we accept the child's view of himself and work to meet his deficiencies.

   a. If the child believes he is one thing and we insist he is another, he will lose faith in us, refuse to trust us.

   b. It is our task to provide him with opportunities to succeed which will gradually help him change his own view of himself.

IV. The environment for the development of a positive self-concept includes everyone and everything with which the child comes into contact.

A. The child:

1. The demands his body makes upon him and the way it responds to his own demands

2. The way his mind is able to take in new information, sort it out, and give meaning to it.

B. The teacher:

1. Should be a genuine, honest person with honest reactions.

   a. This means s/he does not present a facade (false front) to children.

      1) S/he knows who s/he is.

      2) S/he does not pretend to be something s/he is not.

   b. Tension in children and in the center may be created by what John Holt calls the "behavior gap".

      1) Certain things which happen may annoy the teacher, but s/he does not take action immediately.

      2) The period of time between when s/he becomes annoyed and when s/he takes action is the "behavior gap". (See Module #5 - Guidance Principles.)

2. Should accept the attitude of the child as it is.

   a. There can be times when it is a mistake to praise children especially if the child is not pleased with his own efforts.

   b. It is more important to find out how the child feels and help him appreciate his own effort.

      1) "Tell me about your work."

      2) "Was it a hard job?"

      3) "Did you enjoy doing it?"

3. The teacher should strive for empathetic understanding.

   a. Understanding is trying to see another person's point of view.

   b. Empathetic understanding is trying to see another person's point of view from inside that person.

      1) Try to take into yourself the feelings of the other that led him to that point.

      2) Be prepared to suffer as well as to rejoice with the other.

4. If the teacher has the three qualities listed, s/his planning will be sensitive to the needs of each child in the group, and s/his encouragement will be meaningful.

C. Other adults in the center:

1. Visitors to the center help the children learn to relate to other adults.

a. They may be persons who help the child in his growth toward a positive self-concept or they may unintentionally interrupt or damage that growth.

b. If the latter happens, it is the teacher's responsibility to help the child understand why the other adult acted as s/he did.

2. The teacher should, whenever possible, help prepare other adults for visiting the center.

D. Other children:

1. Generally we might say that children, left on their own, will work out their own problems.

a. There may be times when the teacher will have to intervene.

b. Should this occur, s/he should make every effort to see that s/his intervention is timely and fair to all.

2. It is healthy to have a good mix of children in groups.

a. Younger children benefit from the support of older children, and older children gain feelings of worth from helping younger children.

b. Just as we grow by learning to understand and accept others, so do children grow by learning to accept similarities and differences in one another.

E. Space and time:

1. There should be adequate space in which to move and explore.

2. There should be adequate time for wonder, discovery, and experimentation.

F. Materials:

1. The materials in a center belong to the children.

a. Buckminister Fuller said, "If you want to do something nice for a child, give him an environment where he can touch as much as he wants."

b. Materials which are unsafe or are not meant for the children's use should not be left within their reach.

2. Materials in the center should have integrity.

EXAMPLE:

Unit blocks are solid, durable, pleasant to see and touch, and do what they are supposed to do.

a. Materials which have integrity help insure success and lower frustrations for children.

b. Sometimes children may not be able to distinguish between faulty material and faulty manipulation.

EXAMPLE:

The child who is working on a puzzle with missing pieces may decide he he dumb because he cannot complete the puzzle.

3. There should be a wide variety of materials.

   a. Materials which encourage curiosity.

   b. Materials which encourage different types of play and learning.

   c. Materials which fit within the age, interest, and ability range of the children in the center.

   d. Materials which lend themselves to creative activity.

   e. Materials which help reinforce the child's own growing concept of himself as a worthwhile person who can do many things.

4. There should be an adequate but not an excessive amount of materials.

   a. Children should be able to use some materials without having to share.

      1) The creative process may be frustrated if someone else always has what the child needs or wants to use.

      2) Solitary play is a necessary part of the growth process.

   b. Children should be able to have a choice of materials.

      1) Too much material may confuse children and make choices difficult.

      2) Too much materials may create clutter which frustrates a a child's need for order and discourages his attempts to care for the material.

5. The children should be taught to care for the materials in the center.

   a. There should be definite rules regarding use of expensive equipment such as a record player.

   b. There should be adequate storage and display spaces for the materials so the children may learn to replace materials when they are through using them.

   c. As children develop a feeling of responsibility for the materials they also develop a feeling of capability and importance for themselves.

6. The material in the center should reflect the culture of the children in the center.

a. Culturally relevant materials reinforce the link between home and school.

b. Culturally relevant materials in the center not only give the child a feeling of acceptance they also encourage feelings of pride.

CONCLUSION:

As we have seen, the first step in helping a child build and/or maintain a positive self-concept is to know and accept the child as he is. Each child is unique with different physical and social factors influencing his development. Each child is also like every other child with the same basic needs for his development as a whole and healthy human being. Understanding these influences and these needs will help us be a positive influence in each child's life.

It is our responsibility as teachers to provide an environment which fosters growth. That environment includes everything. Therefore, there may be elements which we have little or no control. However, if we maintain a warm, accepting attitude toward the child, we can build a trust relationship in which positive self-concepts for both the child and ourselves will grow.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Baker, Katherin Read, Ed. IDEAS THAT WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN, Washington, D.C., National Association for Education of Young Children, 1972. (Suggested Reading: "The Strength of the Young Child" - pp 13-19.)

2. Frailberg, Selma H. THE MAGIC YEARS, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.

3. Hess, Robert D. and Doreen J. Croft. TEACHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972. (Suggested reading: Chapter 7 - Social Concepts and Behavior" - pp 200-227.)

4. Holt, John. FREEDOM AND BEYOND, New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1972.

5. Maslow, Abraham H. TOWARD A PSYCHOLOGY OF BEING, 2nd ed., New York, D. Van Nostrand Co., 1968.

6. Moustakas, Clark E. PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH CHILDREN, THE LIVING RELATIONSHIP, New York, Ballantine Books, 1959.

7. Simont, Marc and Members of the Staff of the Boston Children's Medical Center. A CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF THE WORLD, Boston, Delacorte Press, 1972.

SUPPLEMENT

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SUPPLEMENT #1 - TEACHER-CRAFT

I am indebted to Margaret McConnon for the concept of "teacher-craft". It is her belief that many potentially good teachers need only some simple "how-to-do-it-yourself" instructions in order to become teachers who help each child fulfill his own potential to become the whole person he can be.

The following "how-to-do-it-yourself" chart is a combination of our efforts which we hope will prove helpful to you in you efforts to be the teacher you really want to be.

"HOW-TO-DO-IT-YOURSELF" CHART

TEACHER NEEDS	ARE FILLED BY	TEACHER-CRAFT
to be free from fear	having a safe, healthy environment. Being able to trust self and others.	Keep the area free of hazards. Observe good health rules. Set and enforce limits with firmness and consistency. Be yourself. Be honest. Be reliable. Keep promises. Do what you will say you will do
to be free from guilt	tolerance from others. Self-understanding.	Do not set impossible goals for the child. Never shame a child or force him to say, "I'm sorry." Help him to know that everyone makes mistakes. Encourage him to talk about how he feels.
love and affection	warm relationships	Show the child you care for him both in words and actions. Sometimes a soft, "I love you," and a hard hug makes everything right. Spend some time with him in a rocking chair.
belonging	being accepted	Get to know the child and accept him as he is before you try to change him. Be able to say honestly to the child, "I like you just the way you are."
knowledge	exploration and experimentation	Encourage curiosity by providing an environment rich with things that children may see and touch and smell and taste and hear. Then let it happen.

con't on next page

TEACHER NEEDS	ARE FILLED WITH	TEACHER-CRAFT
achievement	successful experiences	Provide the child with opportunities to do all kinds of things, creative as will as utilitarian. Recognize efforts. "You did a good job." "I like that."
self-respect	sense of responsibility	Allow the child to do meaningful, necessary work. Accept the child's efforts. Do not re-do what he has just done. Help him evaluate his own work.
self-esteem	all of the above	Give the child a good model. Get to know yourself and accept yourself. Be able to say honestly, "I like myself just the way I am."

SUPPLEMENT #2 - SOME WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Clint Reimer, Bethel School District - Eugene, Oregon

These thoughts are intended to be of help to parents and teachers in working with children. Whether these suggested remarks will in fact be encouraging will depend on the attitudes of the adults using them. Is the feeling one of belief in the child, trust, confidence, acceptance sometimes mixed with humor; or is the feeling one of moralizing, preaching, impatience?

1. "You do a good job of..."

   Children should be encouraged when they do not expect it, when they are not asking for it. It is possible to point out some useful act or contribution in each child. Even a comment about something small and insignificant to us may have great importance to a child.

2. "You have improved in..."

   Growth and improvement is something we should expect from all children. They may not be where we expect or would like them to be, but if there is progress, there is less chance for discouragement. Children will usually continue to try if they can see improvement.

3. "We like (enjoy) you, but we don't like what you do."

   Often a child feels he is not liked after he has made a mistake or misbehaved. A child should never think he is not liked. It is important to distinguish between the child and his behavior, between the act and the actor.

4. "You can help me (us, the others, etc.) by..."

   To feel useful and helpful is important to everyone. Children want to be helpful; we have to give them the opportunity.

5. "Let's try it together."

   Children who think they have to do things perfectly are often afraid to attempt something new for fear of making a mistake, or failing.

6. "So you do make a mistake; now, what can you learn from your mistake?"

   There is nothing that can be done about what has happened, but a person can always do something about the future. Mistakes can teach a child a great deal and he will learn if he does not feel embarrassed for having made a mistake.

7. "You would like us to think you can't do it, but we think you can."

   This approach can be used when the child says or conveys that something is too difficult for him and he hesitates to even so much as try it. Our expectations should be consistent with the child's ability and maturity.

8. "Keep trying. Don't give up."

   When a child is trying but not meeting much success, a comment like this might be helpful.

Supplement #2 - con't.

9. "I'm sure you can straighten this out (solve this problem, etc.), but if you need any help, you know where to find me."

   Adults need to express confidence that children are able and will resolve their own conflicts, if given a chance.

10. "I can understand how you feel (not sympathy, but empathy) but I'm sure you'll be able to handle it."

    Sympathizing with another person seldom helps him, rather it conveys that life has been unfair to him. Understanding the situation and believing in the child's ability to adjust to it is much greater help to him.

SUPPLEMENT #3 - TWENTY-ONE MEMOS FROM YOUR CHILD

1. Don't spoil me. I know quite well I ought not to have all I ask for. I am only testing you.

2. Don't be afraid to be firm with me. I prefer it, it makes me feel more secure.

3. Don't let me form bad habits. I have to rely on you to detect them in the early stages.

4. Don't make me feel smaller than I am. It only makes me behave stupidly "big".

5. Don't correct me in front of people if you can help it. I'll take much more notice if you talk quietly in private.

6. Don't protect me from consequences. I need to learn the painful way sometimes.

7. Don't make me feel my mistakes are sins. It upsets my sense of values.

8. Don't be too upset when I say "I hate you". It isn't you I hate, but your power to thwart me.

9. Don't take too much notice of my small ailments. Sometimes they get me the attention I need.

10. Don't nag. If you do, I shall have to protect myself by appearing deaf.

11. Don't make rash promises. Remember that I feel badly let down when promises are broken.

12. Don't forget that I cannot explain myself as well as I should like. This is why I'm not always very accurate.

13. Don't tax my honesty too much. I'm easily frightened into telling lies.

14. Don't push (put) me off when I ask questions. If you do, you will find that I stop asking and seek my information elsewhere.

15. Don't tell me my fears are silly. They are terribly real and you can do much to reassure me, if you try to understand.

16. Don't ever suggest that you are perfect or infallible. It gives me too great a shock when I discover that you are neither.

17. Don't ever think it is beneath your dignity to apologize to me. An honest apology makes me suprisingly warm towards you.

18. Don't be inconsistent. It completely confuses me and makes me lose my faith in you.

19. Don't forget I love experimenting. I couldn't get on without it, so please put up with it.

20. Don't forget how quickly I am growing up. It must be very difficult for you to keep pace with me, but please try.

21. Don't ever stop loving me. I need that most of all.